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March 20, 2013

Re: Testimony in support of Senate Bill 1068

Dear Senator Gerratana, Representative Johnson and Members of the Public Health Committee:

On behalf of the COPD Foundation, and as an individual with Alpha-1 related genetic COPD, I am writing to express strong support for CT SB 1068, An Act Concerning Care Coordination for Chronic Disease.

COPD is an umbrella term used to describe progressive lung disease, such as emphysema, chronic bronchitis, refractory (non-reversible) asthma, and some forms of bronchiectasis. This disease is characterized by increasing breathlessness and symptoms include; chronic coughing and wheezing.

The COPD Foundation is a non-profit organization whose mission is to develop and support programs which improve the quality of life through research, education, early diagnosis, and enhanced therapy for persons whose lives are impacted by Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD).

In Connecticut alone, 150,000 adults have been diagnosed and the NIH estimates another 12 million individuals are undiagnosed nationally. COPD is the third leading cause of death and second leading cause of disability in the U.S. Connecticut's female and lower income populations are disproportionately impacted by COPD, and it may surprise you to know that significant levels of COPD were found to occurring in adults as young as 35, with 8.7 percent of adults between the age of 55-64 reporting being diagnosed.

Despite being the nation's third leading cause of death, COPD is not a categorically funded disease within the Center for Disease Control and Prevention's Chronic Disease Division. As a result, COPD does not receive the attention it deserves within most state public health initiatives, further contributing to the rising morbidity, mortality and costs associated with the disease.

As with many other chronic diseases, there are proven methods to reduce costs and improve health status. Through preventive efforts such as tobacco cessation and worksite wellness programs, early and proper diagnosis, pharmacotherapy management, non-pharmacotherapy strategies like pulmonary rehabilitation and oxygen therapy, and comprehensive health management and education, most patients with COPD can be treated.

SB 1068 is important for improving the health of COPD patients because COPD rarely occurs in a vacuum and the average patient has multiple complex co-morbid conditions, contributing to poor health outcomes and increased healthcare costs. In 2010, 21.4 million Medicare/Medicaid beneficiaries had at least two or more chronic conditions. We were pleased when CMS created the Multiple Chronic Conditions Initiative, which seeks to provide quality coordinated health care to beneficiaries in order to maintain quality of life and still control health care costs, and when the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention funded all states to implement coordinated chronic disease programs.

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However, neither of the two national efforts integrates the needs of patients with lung diseases like COPD. We commend you for including lung disease within the scope of the effort and encourage you to ensure it remains an active consideration during the implementation of the bill. The inclusion of lung disease sets the standard for other states to follow in recognizing the need to integrate this major, mostly preventable and often treatable, chronic disease into the overall public health framework.

Through the bill's establishment of a working group to develop a plan to reduce incidences of chronic disease and improve chronic care coordination, the report back to this Public Health Committee and the Governor about the impact of chronic disease and the inventory of programs in the state that have been implemented to improve chronic care coordination, Connecticut will improve lives and save money too. The inclusion of lung disease sets the standard for other states to follow in recognizing the need to integrate this major, mostly preventable and often treatable, chronic disease into the overall public health framework.

The COPD Foundation strongly supports SB 1068 and we urge your support for this important piece of legislation. We stand ready to answer questions, to assist with the bill's implementation and to provide all available resources to help Connecticut's residents impacted by COPD.

Sincerely,

John W. Walsh
President and CEO
COPD Foundation

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